Undergraduate Research: A Crucial Step for Tomorrow's Clinicians

Umesh Hassani[1]

[1] Associate Professor Dept. of Microbiology, NKP Salve Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Nagpur, Maharashtra

"The future of medicine lies in the curious minds of today's students." This statement underlines the importance of nurturing research skills early in medical education. The **National Medical Council** has outlined five key roles for the Indian Medical Graduate (IMG): Clinician, Communicator, Leader/Member of the Healthcare Team, Lifelong Learner, and Professional. A fundamental aspect of being a Lifelong Learner is inquiry-based learning, which can be effectively cultivated through research activities during formative years.

While undergraduate research is increasingly emphasized in various higher education courses, it has not received the attention it deserves in the medical curriculum. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) introduced the Short Term Studentship (STS) Program to familiarize undergraduate medical students with research methodology by associating them with seniors on ongoing projects. However, given the rising number of MBBS students, such opportunities are limited. Many students apply, but only a few are selected.

Undergraduate students pursuing research often face several challenges, including inadequate research education, conflicts between research and academics, and a lack of structured institutional support. Overcoming these hurdles would bring multiple benefits, such as:

- Intellectual growth through deeper exploration of subjects of interest
- Enhanced communication skills through publication of findings
- Improved preparedness for postgraduate research

In my opinion, undergraduate research should not be a privilege reserved for a select few high-ranking students. Instead, it should be an integral part of the medical curriculum, accessible to all students in a structured and supportive environment. Ensuring research exposure for all medical students is essential to prepare the next generation of clinicians and scientists capable of driving advancements in healthcare.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Umesh Hassani

Associate Professor Dept. of Microbiology, NKP Salve Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Nagpur, Maharashtra

Email: drumeshhassani@gmail.com